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Corpus

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that note, the bishop said that he wondered if those who join the new church had really considered their decision's implications.

"I think they should stay (in the official church) because, assuming they love their faith, assuming they love the sacramental life of the church, assuming they love the wider community, by breaking their bonds with us, they give up many things they cherish," he said.

Bishop Clark also said that those who choose the new community should consider several questions.

"What about their children's sacramental life?" he asked of the new community. "Who will confirm them? Who will ordain them?"

Excommunication was one of two latest developments in the Corpus Christi story. On Feb. 24, four former Corpus employees announced at a downtown Rochester press conference that they had filed suit against Bishop Clark, the diocese and Corpus Christi in New York State Supreme Court.

The suit alleges that the defendants were wrongfully terminated from their jobs. The plaintiffs are arguing their one-year contracts were breached, and are asking for 10 months' pay and benefits.

Additionally, the suit is asking that James M. Smith, former director of Rogers House, a parish prison ministry, be reinstated.

Along with Smith, Mike Boucher, former adult education coordinator; Myra Humphrey, former hospitality minister; and Denise Donato, former family minister, are plaintiffs in the suit.

The employees were reportedly fired for refusing to cooperate with Father Daniel McMullin, who replaced Father Callan as parish leader. However, in a



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Michael Boucher, left, Corpus Christi Church's former adult education minister, reads a statement during a press conference in downtown Rochester Feb. 24 announcing a lawsuit filed against the Diocese of Rochester. The suit contests the firing of Boucher and three other former Corpus staff members. At right is the plaintiffs' attorney, Matthew J. Fusco.

press statement, the plaintiffs argue that they were never given any specific directives regarding cooperation with Father McMullin. They added that they were never warned they might be fired.

Because the matter is in litigation, the diocese has declined to comment on the suit. Father McMullin did not return phone calls from the *Courier*.

Since Father Callan's removal from his job, parishioners who support his ideas have formed a new community that is calling itself "New Faith Community" temporarily. The new community has held worship services at three Protestant churches in Rochester, and reportedly plans to locate its offices at one of them — Salem United Church of Christ. Services have drawn hundreds, and a Christ-

mas service at the Presbyterian church reportedly drew more than 1,000 people.

The new faith community's administrator is Mary Ramerman, former pastoral associate at Corpus who was also fired. According to Father Callan, he and Father Enrique Cadena, Corpus' former associate pastor — who is on leave from the priesthood — are the new community's associate pastors.

Father Cadena, a native Mexican and a U.S. permanent resident, said that he will travel to Mexico in late March to discuss his status with his superiors in his order, the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit. He noted that he will leave his order, but not the priesthood at this time. He also said he no longer wants to be called "Father."

Father McKenna addressed the status of Father Callan and Father Cadena in the excommunication statement.

"For the priests involved, a further step could be dismissal from the clerical state," Father McKenna added. "For the good of the faithful, the bishop could be forced to petition for dismissal. This would remove any confusion regarding whether they were still Catholic priests."

In a follow-up interview after the Feb. 25 service, Father Callan noted that he had been warned of the possibility of excommunication in a letter from the diocese about a month ago. However, he said he only learned that the diocese considered him excommunicated when a local newspaper reporter spoke with him.

"I would have appreciated the courtesy of a phone call or letter informing me that I had been thrown out of the church I love," Father Callan said, noting that he will celebrate the 25th anniversary of his priesthood this year.

But Father Joseph D. Hart, co-vicar general of the diocese, said that the diocese considered the letter informing Father Callan that he risked excommunication to have been sufficient notice.

"It's nothing we've done," Father Hart said of excommunication. "It's something (Father Callan's) done."

Father Callan added that he will not compromise on the issues that led to his removal.

"I think it was a mistake," he said of the diocese's excommunication statement. "It would have been better if the diocese had let things alone."

But Father Hart said that it was press inquiries — not a desire on the part of diocesan officials — that led to the issuance of the excommunication statement. The statement simply clarified the issue, Father Hart explained.

Up to now, the new community has been holding Communion services using consecrated hosts provided by a source the community refuses to identify. But in light of the excommunication announcement, Father Callan said, the community is considering holding its own Masses and

consecrating its own hosts. Nonetheless, he added that the community considers itself "Catholic" and is unlikely to join any other denomination.

"We're going to be welcomed back by the church that excommunicated us," Father Callan predicted. However, he said, such a welcome may not happen for at least 10 to 20 years.

Whether or not the new community will return to the official church's fold, members who spoke to the *Courier* seemed united in their dismissal of the diocese's excommunication announcement. Although many expressed sadness at the announcement, they also generally said it would not keep them from attending services at Catholic parishes or seeking the sacraments at those parishes.

"We're feeling more Catholic than ever," said Bill Barry, a spokesman for the Spring Committee, a group of Corpus parishioners that has supported Father Callan's stances.

Barry added that the church had reversed its position on certain excommunicants before, and predicted it would do so again in regard to the Corpus dissidents. When asked if he would ever repent of his positions, he said, "No."

"I will only take into account the history of the Vatican removing the egg on its face," he said, noting the church's admission of past errors.

Diane Williams, another member of the new community, said the excommunication announcement was making her think anew about her relationship to the official church.

"You really have to wonder whether you support Catholicism as it stands," she said.

Another woman attending the Feb. 25 service echoed the sentiment of a number of ex-Corpus members on the excommunication announcement.

"I think that's just a matter of semantics," Heidi Tyler said of excommunication. "That's nothing I spend a lot of time worrying about."

One woman — who asked not to be identified — said she works for a Catholic parish, but, nonetheless, would continue to attend services held by the new community despite the excommunication announcement.

She noted that while she enjoys worshiping in a traditional Catholic manner, she also likes the balance between the sexes she sees in the new community's leadership and liturgies.

"I am just not willing to have the only experience of church be a patriarchal experience of church," she said.

She added that she would like to continue working for her parish while attending services with the new community. She said her employer had informed her she would be supported in her position as long as possible, but that the situation could change.

"I really, really hope that it doesn't come to an ultimatum where I have to choose between my job and the alternative (community)," she said.

Ramerman — who said she still considers herself a Catholic — added she will help Catholics struggling with their conflicting loyalties to the official church and the new community.

"I think, certainly, we will be helping people to discern the place that is best for them," she said. "If it's in this community, that's fine. If it's in the Catholic Church, that's fine, too."

Meanwhile, Bishop Clark said that he understood that some former Corpus parishioners in the new community believe they have no place in a Catholic Church they feel is unjust. However, he said, the church is filled with people who are working to make it more just, and that the church needs all of its members to become more perfect.

"I think to be Roman Catholic is sometimes to be patient with our own sinfulness, our own injustice, our own slowness," he said.

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